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SUBJECT: CENTER-RIGHT PARTIES LEAD IN RUN UP TO LATVIA'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Ref: a) Riga 761 b) Riga 762

¶1. Summary: Latest opinion polls conducted just days before Latvia's October 7 parliamentary elections suggest that center-right parties are likely to retain power with increasing discussion that current Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis will remain at the helm of the next government. However, due to the large number of undecided voters (nearly 20 percent), definite predictions as to exactly what parties and politicians might make up the next government are premature. End summary.

¶2. According to an opinion poll conducted at the end of September, the People's Party (TP) and the Greens and Farmers' Union (ZZS) are neck and neck for the first spot with 12.6 percent and 12.3 percent, respectively. Russia-oriented For Human Rights in a United Latvia (PCTVL) follows with 8.8 percent. The winners of the 2002 election, New Era (JL), have slumped to 7.1 percent. Ainars Slesers' First Party/Latvia's Way (LPP/LC) slate, nationalist Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (TB/LNNK) and center-left Harmony Center are all hovering above the five-percent threshold with 5.9 percent, 5.8 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively. The other parties will have to scramble very hard to cross the five-percent barrier. However, the large number of undecided voters (18.6 percent) will play a significant role in deciding which of the major parties will come out on top.

¶3. Depending on the outcome of the elections, it is likely that the current coalition of TP, ZZS and LPP/LC will make up the core of the next government. If TP finishes on top of the poll, Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis may well retain his job. If ZZS wins the elections, they may push for their candidate, Ventspils' mayor Aivars Lembergs, as the next PM, although President Vike-Freiberga has made it clear that she would not ask him to form a government. LPP/LC's candidate Ainars Slesers stands a chance to become PM if his party does not do significantly worse than TP and ZZS (which is not what the polls currently suggest), and if the two larger parties block each another's candidate. It is quite clear, though, that none of the parties will win an absolute majority of seats in the Saeima (parliament), and days if not weeks or even months of horse-trading lie ahead.

¶4. Polls will close at 10PM on October 7 and counting will go into the early morning and likely continue into October 8. By sometime on the 9th, or possibly the 10th, we should at least know which parties have won how many seats and then the coalition building math, if not the politics, will become clearer.

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